

FAQ for Parents

1. *As parents, do we have to know French?*

No, you do not have to know French. The best way to help your son or daughter is to support them and to encourage them in their study of French: for instance, watching TV in French with them, listening to a small book they would like to read to you, etc. As a matter of fact, if you do not speak French, your son or daughter will probably become more autonomous because they will have to call friends or look in their dictionary if they have problems with their homework. However, if you do speak French, it is important to only encourage and support them and not give the answers.

2. *Do children have extra work to do?*

No, they do not have extra work because of the curriculum. According to the theory behind Intensive French, the cognitive processes used and developed in the learning of a second language (French) are the same as the ones used and developed in the learning of the first language (English). For instance, once a child has learned in French how to write a paragraph, it is not necessary to relearn this process in English: some transfer can and will occur, as the experiment in Newfoundland has shown. This is why English language arts can be “compressed”, that is, reduced in time for the first five months of the school year.

There are also cognitive processes that are the same as the ones used and developed in the learning of other subjects, such as science, social studies, etc. (for instance, solving problems, making hypothesis, etc). A careful study of the processes involved in the learning of other subjects showed that there is some overlapping, however, some processes are specific to particular subjects. This is why time is devoted to the learning of other subjects can be compacted or reduced to a certain extent.

3. *What happens to their English?*

As the three-year experience in Newfoundland has shown, there will be absolutely no negative effect on the child’s English skills. Due to the fact that learning a second language, such as French, must be seen as an overall literacy experience. This is why in the teaching of Intensive French; we have adopted a language arts approach, where we teach not only the oral language but also the reading and writing. All the processes involved in the study of these skills in French, which are the same as in English, are transferred into English during the last five months of the school year. The increase in time, allows for more time devoted to literacy development. Furthermore, during the first five months, your child should have a few books to read in English and will be required to write a journal entry each day.

4. *What happens to other subjects?*

As many processes in the learning of subjects such as science, social studies, etc. are the same as the ones used and developed in the learning of French (generalizing, making hypothesis, etc.) it is not necessary to relearn these processes. This explains why, even if time is reduced in some other subjects, the results achieved can be the same, as shown in practice during the three-year experience in Newfoundland. Your child will not have to relearn processes that have been already learned in French.

5. *What happens to Mathematics?*

There will be no negative effects on mathematics. This subject is not compacted.

6. *What happens if a child cannot keep up with the French?*

Your child should not have too much difficulty because French is taught as a means of communication, and not as an object of study. As curriculum in Intensive French is based mainly on the interest of children, who learn how to speak about things that really interest them, they become motivated and interested: they talk about themselves, their families, their favourite animals, sports they like, films, etc.

7. *Do you still teach grammar?*

Yes. However, that is not the starting point of a lesson. Lessons are based on themes or project type activities that interest students at that age. There is no specific vocabulary or language structures or grammar rules already prescribed within the curriculum. The students learn the vocabulary and the structures they need to talk and write about through themes they are studying. However, obviously when necessary, grammar is taught but its usefulness can easily be understood by children. Grammar is not an end in itself.

8. *What happens if my child already has difficulty in school with core French?*

We must realize that Intensive French is, to a certain extent (depending on the existing school tradition), a new approach, and a new way of learning a second language. Children can more easily see the practical value of learning a second language because they can see they can use French to communicate. With the increase in time, it is possible to reach a threshold level, where a child can really start communicating in French. This is why more hours are necessary for the learning of a second language. Even when a “communicative approach” is used in regular core French, the number of hours in a school year does not allow the majority of children to reach a level where they can initiate and sustain a simple conversation in French.

9. *What happens in the second semester?*

During the first or last five months of the school year, children go back to their regular curriculum, including a few periods of French.

10. *How is Intensive French different from Immersion?*

Basically, in French immersion, students learn subjects, such as mathematics, science or social studies, in French. In other words, they have to learn French at the same time they are learning a subject.

In Intensive French, no school subject is taught in the second language. The focus is on the learning of the second language. Obviously, when we talk, we have to talk about “something”. So it is possible that children in class will talk about, for instance, the different provinces in Canada, or about the environment (according to the themes chosen). However, children are not evaluated on these subjects as such: they do not have to be tested in French in order to see if they achieved the prescribed outcomes in social studies, science, and so on. It only makes it easier for them to learn about the content area when the time comes in the completed curriculum.

11. *What will a child be able to do in French?*

At the end of the school year, where Intensive French is offered, children should be able to carry on a general conversation on ordinary topics. They should also be able to write with a reasonable degree of accuracy: for instance, write a letter to a friend or reply to a letter from a friend, write a message to people of their own age, ask relatively simple questions, etc. They should be able to read simple articles in a newspaper and magazines for young people. Again, the focus of Intensive French is on the learning of French as a means of communication, and not as an academic subject of study. They will not be necessarily prepared, as such, to learn subjects in their second language.

12. *What will happen to the weaker students?*

It will be a positive learning experience in literacy, even if chances are that low achievers will still be low achievers. However, in the three-year experience in Newfoundland, it has been noticed, in a few individual cases, that some low achievers have made tremendous progress not only in French but also in English. The explanation is the following: with the increased time in French, these students eventually started seeing themselves as “good” students, at least compared to other students in French at the same grade level. This contributed to the development of their self-esteem and self-confidence, which are important factors contributing to success in their learning.

13. *How is the course different from what they normally do in French?*

If French is already taught as an authentic means of communication, in the regular core French, changes will be modest but important. However, because of the increase in time, the level achieved will obviously be higher. Furthermore, because we have adopted an integrated approach in Intensive French, we not only teach oral language, but also give some importance to reading and writing, which is not necessarily usually the case in the regular core French. In that sense, results could be very different.

In schools where French is usually taught as an object of study, with a lot of time spent on learning vocabulary and grammar, with less time devoted to the learning of using the language in authentic situations, changes will be more important. Furthermore, the language used by the teacher, all the time, in Intensive French is...French.

14. *How can I help my Child?*

See questions 1. and 2.

15. *Won't having all this French be boring?*

Absolutely not. Because when language is conceived of as authentic means of communication, and when children are asked to speak, read and write about subjects that interest them, they are not bored, as experience has shown.

16. *Will only oral French be developed?*

No. In intensive French we have adopted an integrated approach, that is, we still focus on the oral but we also teach how to read and how to write. The learning of a language is seen as an overall literacy experience.

17. *Will the teacher speak French all the time?*

Yes. All the time: the use of English language by the teacher will occur, for a very short period of time, at the beginning of Intensive French.

18. *What are the proven "benefits" of Intensive French?*

Your son or daughter will greatly increase their communicative skills in French and Intensive French will be an overall enhancement of their school experience. As side effects with Intensive French in Newfoundland and with Intensive English in Quebec, students increased their self-esteem, their self-confidence, their responsibility and their autonomy. In other words, Intensive French will not only increase their ability to communicate in French, but will greatly contribute to their personal and social development.